



LawWorks Clinics Network Report

**Analysis of clinic activity across the
Lawworks Clinics Network Between
January 2019 - December 2019**

Lawworks, June 2020

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Introduction

LawWorks supports and develops a growing network of legal advice clinics across England and Wales. Setting up and supporting free legal advice clinics has been a long-standing feature of LawWorks' work, and as of March 2020 there were nearly 290 clinics in the LawWorks Clinics Network.

This report is being published (June 2020) at a time of continued crisis and uncertainty, as we come to terms with both the short and long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some commentators speak of a defining moment or watershed in history: pre Covid-19 and post Covid-19. Whilst this report is retrospective (covering January to December 2019) - capturing activity just a few months past, but in many ways now seemingly so long ago - it also includes just some examples of how clinics have responded quickly and effectively to the lockdown and have continued to deliver vital pro bono services. There has never been a more important time to ensure that people, often the most vulnerable and isolated in our communities, receive the support they need, including access to legal advice and information.

Pro bono is a profound expression of volunteering, the devotion of time, experience and skills to help those in need. It is something for which the many thousands of lawyers, law schools, law students and other volunteers across the Clinic network should feel immensely proud, even more so today.

This report shows that over the past year clinics have been dealing with a high volume of inquiries. It is difficult to draw too many conclusions from this – as with all reporting systems, the data collected is as much a measure of 'supply' as it is of 'demand'. However, evidence shows that there is a high level of unmet legal needs. A YouGov survey of almost 30,000 adults, published earlier this year, reported that about one-third of the 60% of those who had faced a legal issue in the past three years did not receive any help. The human cost of legal problems – particularly if they escalate or multiply – cannot be captured in numbers alone.

The trends in this report reflect a continued pattern of high demand and capacity challenges for some clinics – this is no surprise, with the ongoing impact of cuts to legal aid and reductions in local authority funding. LawWorks is passionate about pro bono and its contribution to enabling access to justice, but it is always necessary to underline that pro bono is not, and should never be seen as, an alternative to legal aid, nor for funding for the work of law centres and advice agencies. Pro bono works most effectively when it complements and supports wider legal and advice provision, and is tailored to particular areas of need.

We will reflect on how we can best collect data for 2020, recognising the unprecedented challenges that clinics are now facing as a result of the pandemic, but also recognising the importance of capturing data, to illustrate and highlight the vital work clinics are doing to support, and often change the lives for the better of their beneficiaries.



Martin Barnes
Chief Executive

A growing network

LawWorks supports and develops a growing network of legal advice clinics across England and Wales. Setting up and supporting free legal advice clinics has been a long-standing feature of LawWorks' work, and the LawWorks Clinics Network (in March 2020) totalled 287 clinics^{i,ii}. The Covid-19 lockdown had an immediate impact with a number of clinics not finding it possible to continue to deliver a service.

While each clinic is unique, they generally involve a partnership bringing together a mix of law schools, law firms and legal teams with advice agencies and other charities to support individuals in the local community.

LawWorks is able to help with the development of new clinic services from initial idea stage through to piloting and launch, as well as providing ongoing support and consultancy to established clinics. In 2014 there were 175 clinics registered on the LawWorks network, so it is heartening to see that number increase by over 100 in the last 5 years. This rise in clinic activity has coincided with a period of severe public spending cuts for free legal advice and support, with a near 80% loss of funding and capacity in social welfare and family law servicesⁱⁱⁱ. With unmet need for legal advice estimated by researchers to be one in three people or more, development of pro bono capacity and new clinics alone cannot be expected to address the challenges of unmet need^{iv}.

Clinics in the network have traditionally focused on providing initial advice to clients. As our previous outcomes data suggests^v, an initial advice session can provide the reassurance needed for the client to take the issues forward themselves, and strengthen legal literacy and legal capability. Initial advice also provides a space to identify client eligibility for legal aid support, and often clinics provide the gateway to access local legal aid or other funded in-depth support.

The number of volunteers in clinics has remained steady, as has the diversity of the network and the number of clinics in Wales and the English regions. We increasingly see clinics offering services that go beyond initial advice and able to deal with more specialist areas of law.

Figure 1: Types of clinic service



90% Offer initial advice



50% Offer written advice



30% Offer form filling



21% Offer casework



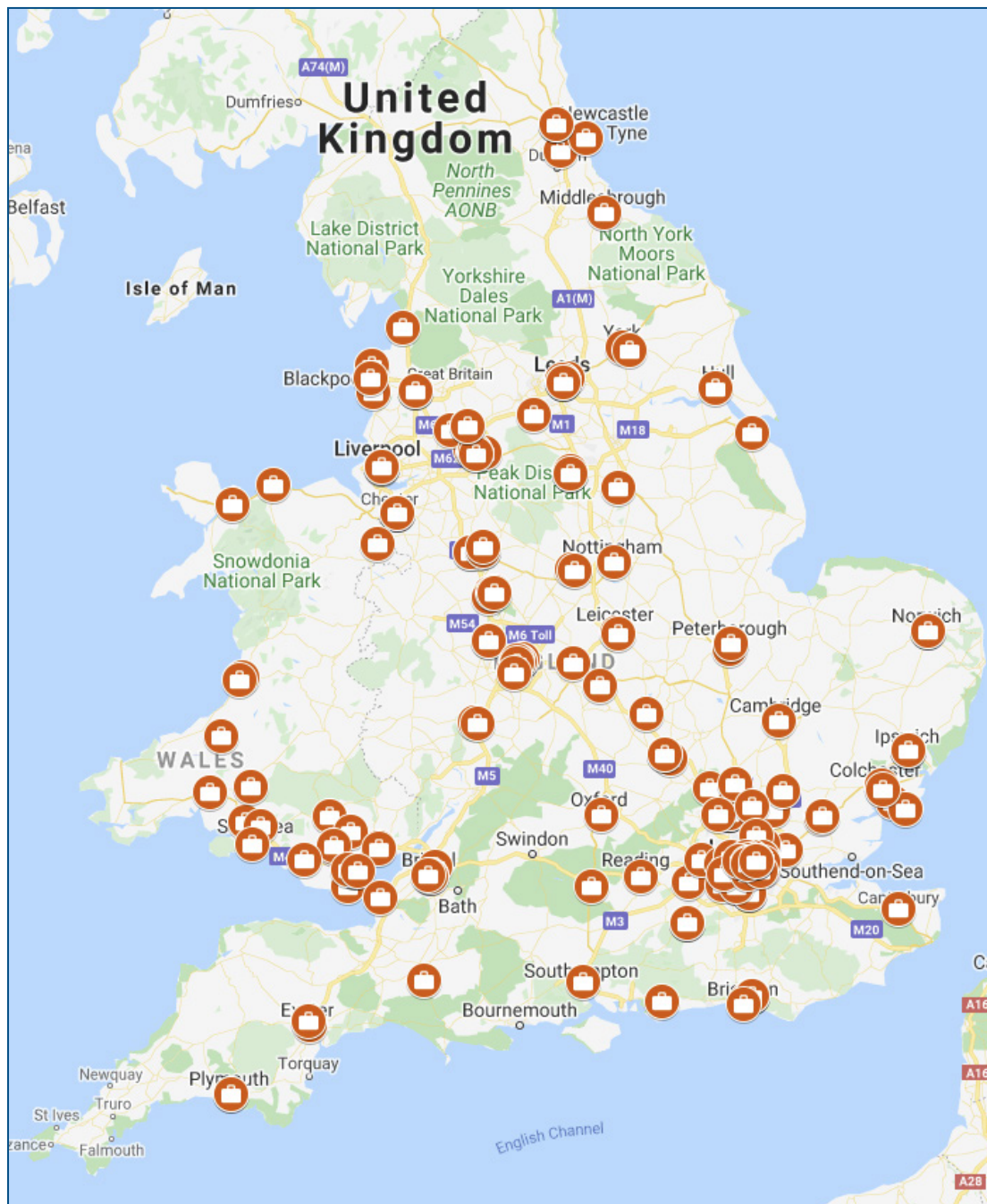
15% Offer representation

Geographical spread

The challenge of legal “advice deserts” has been well documented, including by the Law Society’s “End Legal Advice Deserts Campaign”^{vi}. This has found, for example, that over a third (37%) of the population of England and Wales live in a local authority area with no housing legal aid providers.

Pro bono clinics cannot (and should not be expected to) fill these gaps in legal aid, either in areas where there is insufficient legal aid supply, or for matters for which there is no legal aid because the legal issues are out of scope. However, it is encouraging to see that clinics are spreading out across the English regions and Wales, often focussing on areas of high unmet need.

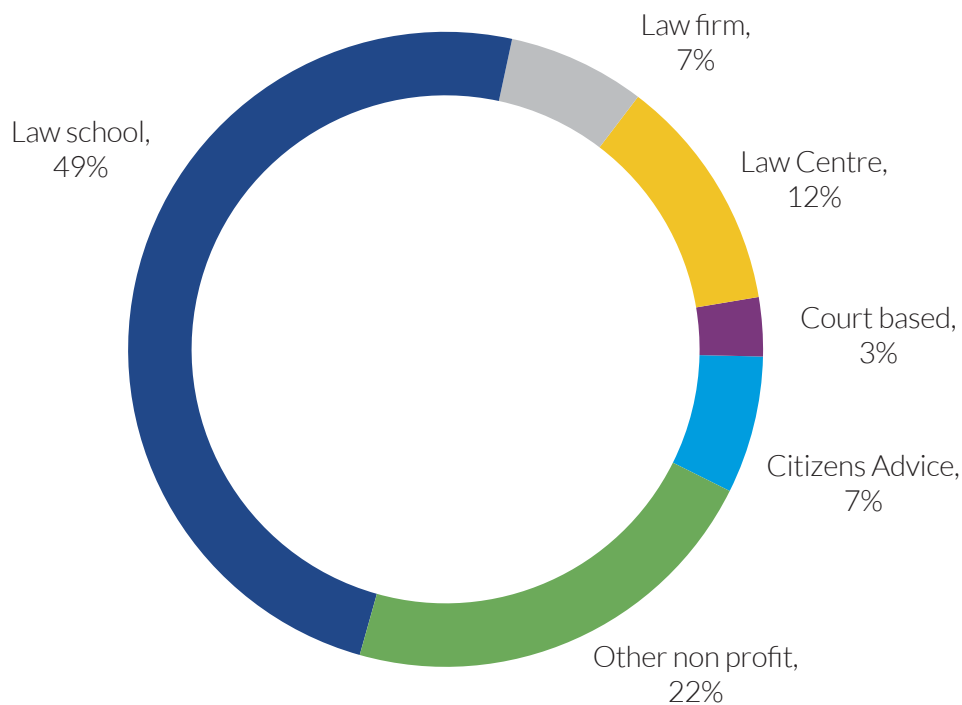
Figure 2: Map of England and Wales clinics



A volunteering network

All clinics in the LawWorks Network are independent and self-managed; the network is diverse with significant variations in service models, but they all share the same core components of volunteering whether by solicitors (individuals, firms and in-house teams), law students or other legal professionals. Usually clinics are attached to law schools, advice agencies or other charities/community organisations, and operate in those settings.

Figure 3: Clinics by setting



Across the network clinics reported that during 2019 there were 9,545 volunteers; this included students, qualified lawyers and other volunteers. Family law was the most common area of advice followed by employment law.

Figure 4: Volunteering and advice



Clinics in action: Responses to Covid-19

Clinics come in different shapes, sizes and partnerships – there is no “typical” clinic on the LawWorks network. All have been adversely impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and services have had to make fundamental adjustments. As all of the quantitative data collected for this report precedes the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, we have instead compiled some examples of the work of a few selected clinics as case studies to demonstrate how they have been able to adapt and evolve. At the time of going to press (June 2020) 94 clinics report being able to operate remote services.

Birmingham City University Law Clinic (Family Law)

Prior to the lockdown, Birmingham City University (BCU) Law Clinic was running a face to face advice service advising on family law issues every fortnight. Local family law practitioners signed up to a rota to volunteer once per year, with students shadowing the practitioner and learning from them. Since March, the practitioners have been giving advice by telephone, with all available appointments being filled. When students return to university in September, BCU hope to use Microsoft teams for remote meetings until the face to face service can resume.

Poplaw clinics (Dentons)

Together with LawWorks, the law firm Dentons set up the first Poplaw clinic in 2006, with administrative support from law students from Queen Mary University, and later opening a second clinic at the Idea Store library in Whitechapel. When lockdown was announced the clinics immediately remodelled their service to continue to support clients and those most in need of free legal advice. A twice weekly in-person drop-in session has been replaced by advice provided by email (with a facility for clients to email documents) and telephone and is running well. Initial queries are received by the clinics Manager and then allocated to individual lawyers.

University of Manchester Justice Hub

Since lockdown, the Manchester Free Legal Help Scheme and Vacation Scheme have gone virtual, and it is anticipated the Legal Advice Centre will also go virtual for the 2020-2021 academic year – both are part of the University of Manchester’s Justice Hub. The Justice Hub is a partnership between the public, charitable and private sectors with a collaborative approach involving students and academics working with law firms, barristers’ chambers, law centres and charities to provide legal assistance, including a nationwide dementia clinic. Usually the Legal Advice Centre and Manchester Free Legal Help Scheme both operate from the Justice Hub premises and the Manchester Civil Justice Centre (Civil and Family Courts) respectively.

University of Law (Guildford) clinics

When campuses had to close, the four clinics run from the Guildford and Reading campuses of the University of Law moved to an accessible telephone and email service. There was concern initially that some clients would find it difficult or costly to dial in to pre-arranged conference calls. However, the telephone system allows for a clinic host to dial out to multiple parties on the same line, so clients could simply wait for their call at a pre-arranged time. The flexibility and commitment shown by students and volunteer solicitors has kept the service going.

Birmingham Peoples Centre

Birmingham Peoples Centre (BPC) provides free employment rights support to vulnerable people who live or work in Birmingham. The Centre offers advice and information, provides a casework service and representation at the Employment Tribunal. 2 part-time advisers and a dedicated team of volunteers enabled the Centre to open 5 days a week, assisting 1500 people last year.

The Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the service and the volunteer base has reduced. It now provides telephone and email advice – supervision procedures have been reviewed and video conferencing has enabled the team to keep in touch. The service is needed more than ever and BPC are committed to ensuring that a service continues to be available for those who need help.

Dads House

Dads House is a London based charity set up in 2008 to help single dads (and mums!) with the practicalities of raising their children alone. Its services include a foodbank which since the end of March 2020 has been open to assist anyone that needs a helping hand during the most difficult times, and operating as a distribution centre. Drug and alcohol testing is also carried out there. And there's always a cup of tea and a biscuit ready for anyone who wants a chat! The charity's premises has also been hosting a Family Law Advice clinic which has been able to launch as a face to face clinic; the charity established a special space in the far corner of the premises, appropriately partitioned with filing cabinets, desk, and three chairs placed at over 2 metres apart, for the legal advisor, his student assistant, and for the client. The clinic, legal adviser and student assistant all have appropriate PPE with spare masks and gloves.

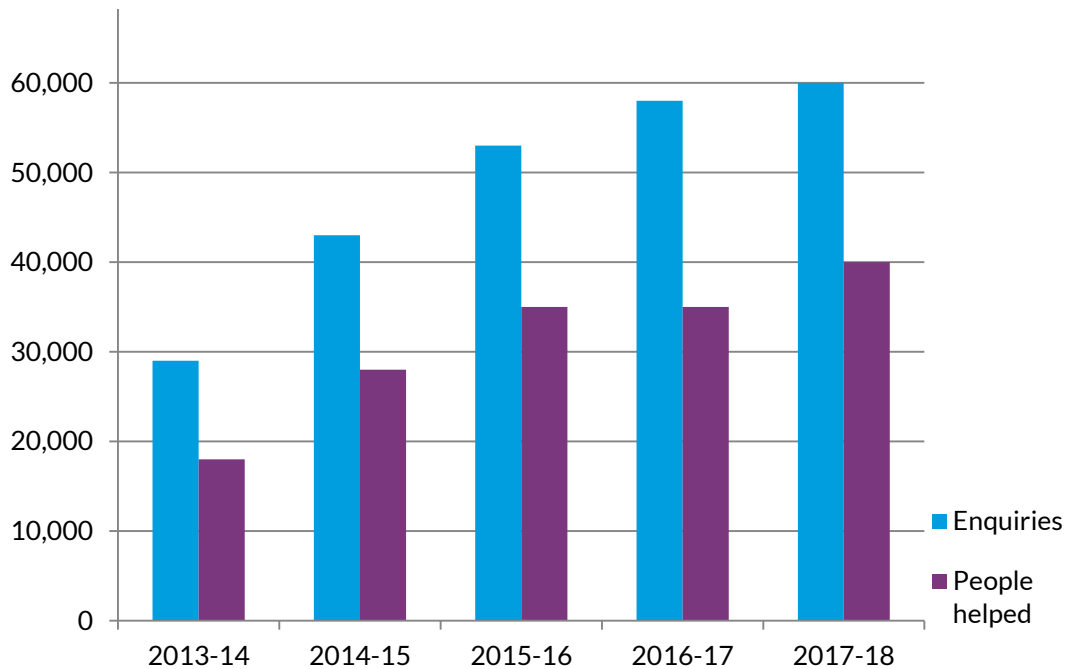
Norfolk Community Law Service (NCLS)

NCLS made early preparations for remote working, and had all staff set up with remote desktops to work from home with notices on the NCLS websites and those of their partners. All services continued without pause and run by phone/email/zoom/WebEx – whatever has worked and been best for the client. NCLS have also developed the concept of the "Justice Bus" which they take out into the community enabling them to provide help to clients who normally would have come to the office. The bus also regularly visits local foodbanks to help to the most vulnerable in society access the service. NCLS volunteers are now working from home, and protocols have been developed to enable this. NCLS commented "Our clients' problems haven't gone away, some have got worse and our services are needed more than ever."

Clinics data

Every year, LawWorks requests data in order to gather an accurate account of pro bono activity in clinics across England and Wales. Year on year, our data has shown an increase in the number of enquiries received, and an increase in the number of clients that clinics have been able to provide support to.

Figure 5: Trends over time 2013-18 (April – April reporting periods)



Source – LawWorks Clinics Network reports for 2013-14^{vii}, 2014-15^{viii}, 2015-16^{ix}, and 2017-18^x

Data review and collection

In early 2018, LawWorks undertook a review of our data collection process and reporting periods. Following this review, since 2019 we have been implementing a new approach to reduce the reporting burden on clinics^{xi}. A key change has been the move to a single calendar year collection period, decreasing the frequency of our data requests and, asking for less information to be collected. We now start the process of annual data collection at the beginning of the calendar year, relating to clinics' data for the previous year^{xii}.

This helped to achieve a good overall return rate for data for 2018, with 83% of the network returning data for the reporting period. This year the number is lower with 73% of clinics returning data for the 2019 period. A significant factor for this year's reduction is that it can take up to three months to secure data returns, and we halted all follow-up data collection in mid-March, recognising that clinic co-ordinators would have other priorities in responding to Covid-19.

During 2019 there were 77,550 separate enquiries received by clinics across the network, compared to 75,907 enquiries received over 2018. Of the 70,261 people helped by clinics in 2019, 37,551 clients (53%) received legal advice.

Around 80% of enquiries were recorded as 'direct enquiries' to the clinic rather than referrals or other routes. The total number of enquiries, how this breaks down, and how they are dealt with is provided below. We note that no help was provided in response to 7,161 (9%) of enquiries.

Figure 6: Enquiries and how they are dealt with

77,550



**Total
number of
enquiries**

70,261



**Number of
people
helped**

32,710



**Number of
people given
information
or referred to
other services**

37,551



**Number of
people
receiving
legal advice**

Not all enquiries will result in the provision of legal advice. Each clinic will have policies and procedures in place for identifying the types of enquiries that require advice and, if advice is not needed or available, then appropriate information, signposting or referral may be provided. Some matters may be beyond the capacity of clinics to deal with (for example, student clinics have reduced capacity in holiday times), and some presenting problems may be either non-legal issues, or beyond clinics' expertise. Many clinics have also told us that some people making enquiries do not follow up after making initial contact.

These statistics do not tell us the whole story though, and in each year there are some variations and outliers in the datasets which can influence the overall pattern. Different clinics have different intake systems, and different coding and recording systems, so the data reflects those differences. We are therefore cautious about how we interpret the data.

Clinics have provided some commentaries on their data recording processes, and these suggest that it is not always straightforward to disaggregate between enquiries, clients helped, advised or referred onwards.

Commentary from clinics about their data recording

"We do signpost a lot as part of the advice we give but do not record signposting specifically. We have a telephone helpline and know we miss a lot of calls too, but do not have a specific figure for it, only an estimate."

"There may be more enquiries for the family law clinics but appointment bookings are handled by third parties."

"The overall total number of persons helped directly and indirectly through our advice may be inestimable."

"We act as a hub for a large number of advisers. We receive all requests online and screen them to filter out queries falling outside the scheme. We have very limited visibility once an eligible query has been allocated to an adviser."

"The questions don't fit our service and there isn't space to fully explain why. Ours is a duty representation scheme. Some clients are referred, some are not, some referrals don't materialise into appeals. Therefore, these figures are for people helped."

"Approximate only - do not get full information when appointments are booked."

"They are rough numbers because we don't have a proper case management system."

We will reflect further on the issues raised to think about how we can better help clinics to capture essential information about how clients and their problems present to clinics, and the support that clients are able to access. A key issue is to better understand the client journey, how they reach the clinic, and how enquiries are triaged and followed up on.

The challenge for any data collection process like this is that one size does not, and cannot, fit all.

We have further broken down the proportion of enquiries by location or type of clinic (i.e. Law School based, court based, advice agency based, etc); this is shown below.

Figure 7: Enquiries by clinic type

	Provided advice	Given information or referred to other services	Not helped
Citizens Advice	4974	21087	100
Court-based non-profit	593	0	0
Law Centre	6486	129	185
Law firm	1850	232	281
Law school	7659	8399	5052
Non-profit	15989	2863	1543
Total	37551	32710	7161

English regions and Wales breakdown

With clinics in the network spread across England and Wales, the following presents information by geographical area. It includes an analysis of the work being conducted by 'national' clinics – those which provide services to individuals across England and Wales regardless of where the client is based, often via online or telephone advice clinics (e.g. national advice lines for specific areas of law).

There is considerable variation across the regions, which reflects the concentration of clinics in different parts of England and Wales. Over 40% of enquiries received and advice given across the network occurs in London^{xiii}.

Figure 8: Enquiries and total number of people helped (by English regions and Wales)

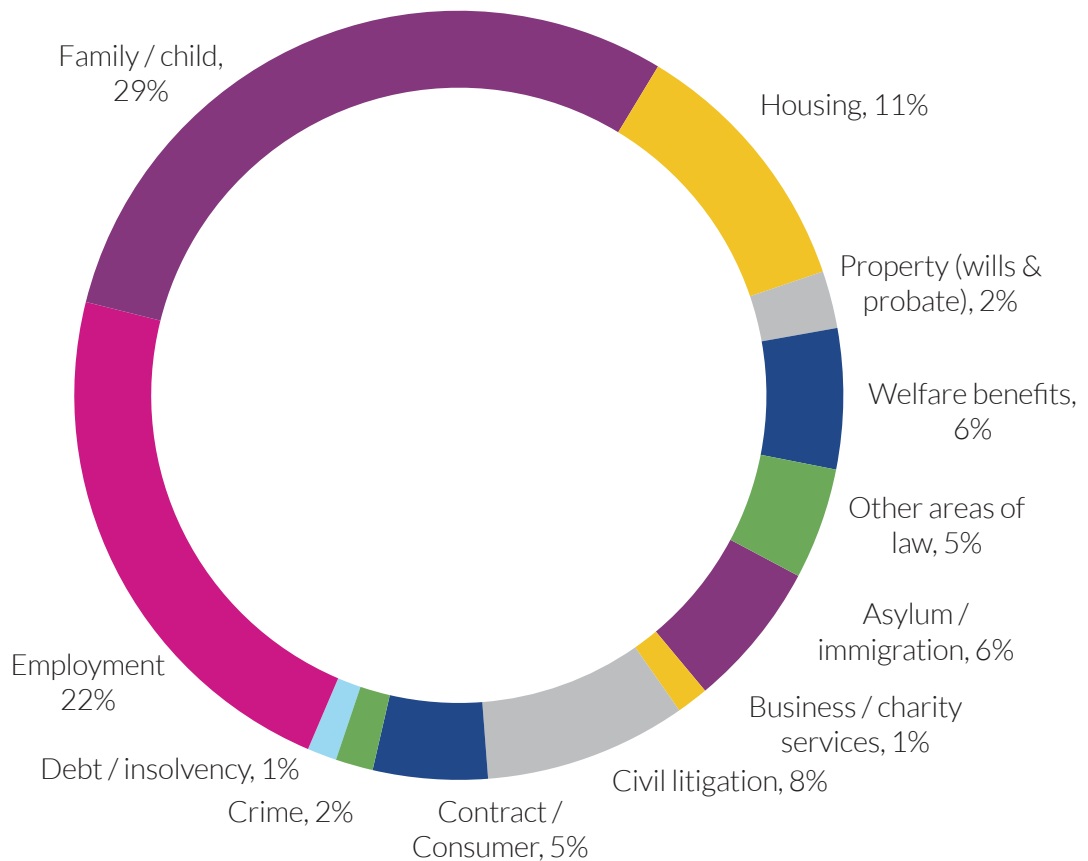
	Provided advice	Given information or referred to other services	Not helped
National	7475	21258	559
East	4033	2079	622
East Midlands	575	693	25
Greater London	17530	2859	2466
North East	409	352	1011
North West	2187	1090	504
South East	883	1651	514
South West	462	210	490
West Midlands	1998	644	513
Yorkshire & Humber	570	898	131
Wales	1429	976	326
Total	37551	32710	7161

Areas of law

The legal problems that bring people to pro bono clinics can be very diverse, but are predominantly civil, social welfare and family law problems. Each clinic decides which areas of law it will offer advice on, informed by local legal need, its own priorities, and the expertise of supervisors and volunteers. Some clinics are specialist in nature and will narrow their offering to advice within a particular area of law. Other clinics are more generalist in scope, offering advice across a broad spectrum of legal issues.

We have broken down clinic enquiries recorded over 2019 by category of law.

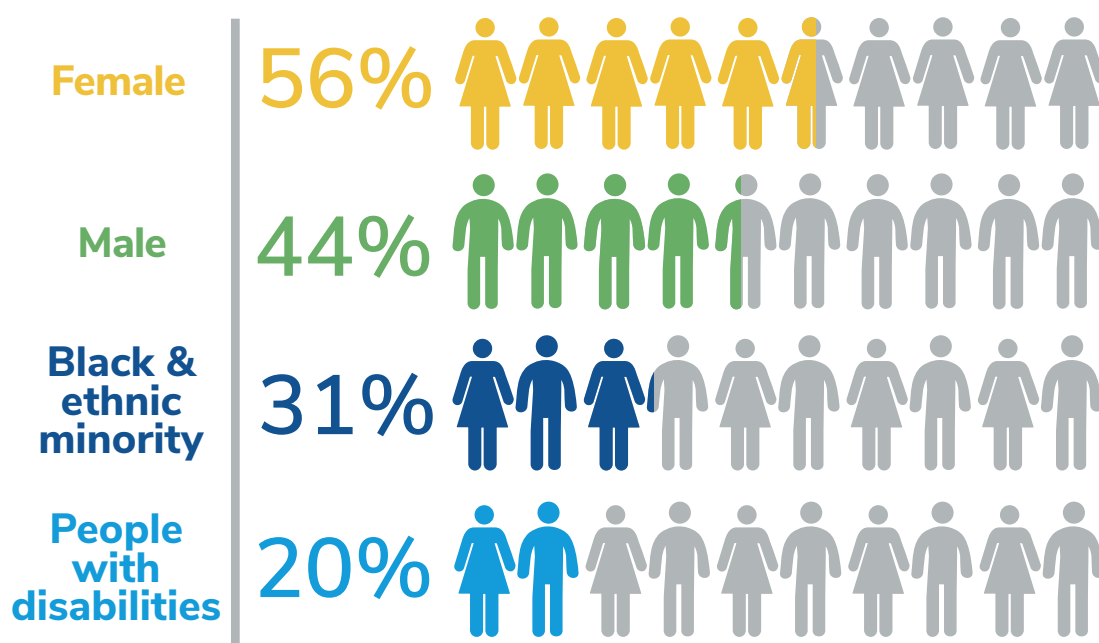
Figure 9: Enquiries by categories of law



Client demographics

LawWorks asks clinics to collect anonymised information on the clients they help in order to identify who is benefiting from their services, and for equalities monitoring. However this year, the data is not as robust as we would like (i.e., a significant proportion of clinics did not provide complete demographic data) and only provides a representative sample, discounting the many responses where clinics had said “prefer not to indicate”. We will review how we support clinics to collect and monitor demographic data which is important, both as good practice under the Equality Act, and to better understand whether, and how, clinics are able to meet the needs of all communities.

Figure 10: Client demographics by gender, disability, and black and minority ethnic community



Client outcomes

Periodically, LawWorks undertakes client monitoring but has not over the past year carried out any monitoring of client outcomes, having completed the work and analysis from the “Better Information Project” in early 2019. Although the findings from this project cover a representative sample of clients from 2016 - 2018 data collection periods, they are nevertheless worth revisiting as a good indicator of the range of legal, capability and wellbeing outcomes that clinics help to secure. Key findings include:-

- Over 90% of clients said they had been listened to well in clinics
- 25% said their problem was fully or partially settled, and a further 17% said it was possible to take further action
- 68% said that advice had helped reduced their level of stress and 52% said they felt physically better as a result of the advice
- 87% said they had an increased understanding of next steps.

These are available on LawWorks website^{xiv}. We are reviewing how we can collect outcomes data in future through a more scaled-up client feedback and outcome monitoring exercise with clinics.

LawWorks Support

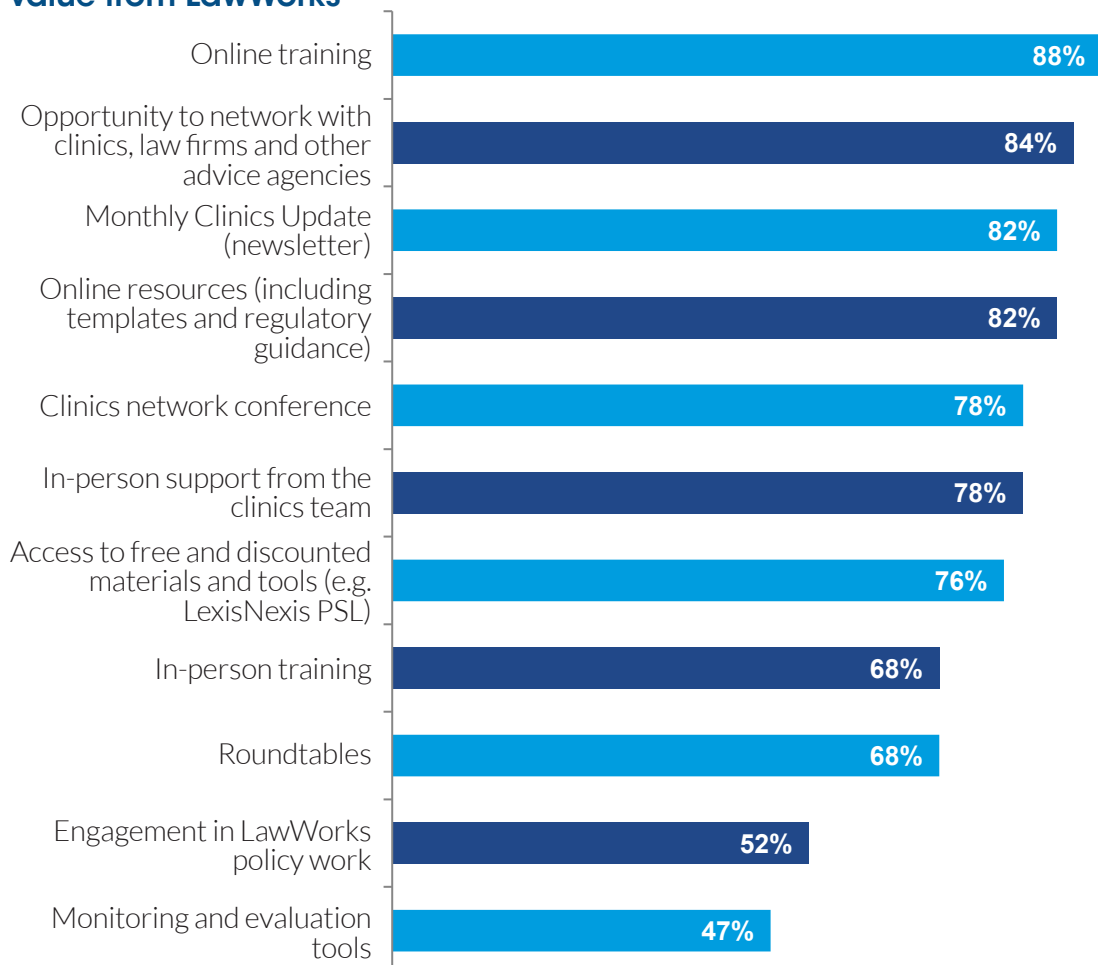
LawWorks will continue to develop its support for clinics, review and update information and resources, and publish our monthly Clinics Update newsletter. Last year we held our first ever clinics conference as an opportunity to discuss with clinic co-ordinators the support we can offer, and what more is needed to help develop capacity across the network. In response to Covid-19, we have developed new platforms and approaches to supporting clinics including online information exchanges and have launched a forum for the LawWorks Clinics Network. We have published specific Covid-19 guidance for clinics, resources on moving to an online/remote service, a new online volunteering form, and a resource for solicitors volunteering whilst on furlough. Our training programme is also constantly developing with new online sessions, topics, short podcasts, and skills training.

In addition to the annual statistics collection, we undertake a yearly survey of clinics co-ordinators. This year the return rate on the survey (which ran from March to May) was low, which we again relate to responding to Covid-19. The data is therefore largely representative; a majority of responses came from law school clinics.

In response to the clinic coordinators survey on what clinics most need and value from LawWorks, online resources and training, and opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge were most in demand. 74% of co-ordinators who responded also valued their membership of the LawWorks Clinics Network highly, and 26% valued it moderately.

Feedback for LawWorks

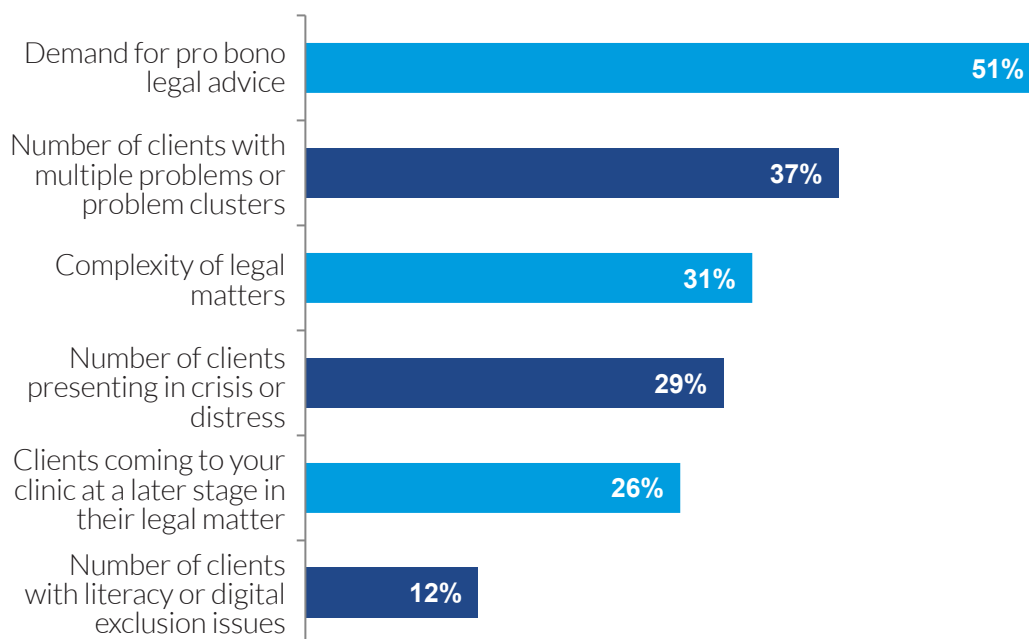
Figure 11: The areas of support and engagement respondents most value from LawWorks



Feedback on demand and trends in clinics

The clinics co-ordinators survey also provides an opportunity to gauge underlying trends experienced by clinics, with over 50% of respondents reporting increased demand, 37% reporting an increase in the number of clients with multiple problems or problem clusters, and 31% reporting an increase in the complexity of legal matters.

Figure 12: Feedback on clinics trends



The clinic co-ordinators survey also reports that 50% of respondent co-ordinators say that there is an increased willingness from local lawyers and law students to volunteer, and 46% of co-ordinators report increased capacity to provide pro bono legal services at their clinic. Whilst this is a positive indication of the growing contribution of clinics, it does not mask or detract from some of the very real challenges that the clinics community is experiencing in dealing with demand. These demands and challenges existed prior to the pandemic, but now have a new dimension as clinics adjust to “the new normal.”

Conclusions

This report is not the last word on our data monitoring, as we now also produce an end of year “Activities and Impact Report^{xv}”, but it does provide an opportunity to share key findings. It also gives us an opportunity to identify gaps and consider how to make our data collection more robust without being burdensome. The most important consideration should always be the client, which is why information about client outcomes and reaching different communities and demographics is so important. As illustrated by the numbers of people, this report demonstrates the collective contribution of a diverse network of clinics. However, there are also challenges ahead for a movement committed to access to justice, and navigating through difficult times and circumstances. Whether provided by solicitors, law students or other legal professionals, the support that clinics provide demonstrates the best of the legal profession’s proud tradition of pro bono, and is something to celebrate.

Endnotes

- i For the purposes of this report, 27 clinics requested not to be contacted about data collection, so the base for our data collection over the 2019 reporting period was 256 clinics in England and Wales.
- ii We have excluded 6 clinics on the network that are outside England and Wales.
- iii https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777038/post-implementation-review-of-part-1-of-laspo.pdf.
- iv See LawWorks’ response to the LAPSO Review (2018), www.lawworks.org.uk/about-us/news/lawworks-submission-laspo-implementationreview.
- v www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/resources/clinic-resources/monitoring-and-impact/client-outcomes.
- vi www.lawsociety.org.uk/policy-campaigns/campaigns/access-to-justice/end-legal-aid-deserts.
- vii www.lawworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/Lawworks-clinics-network-report-Apr-13-Mar-14.pdf.
- viii www.lawworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/LawWorks%20Clinic%20Network%20Report%202014-15.pdf.
- ix www.lawworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/LawWorks%20Clinics%20Network%20Report%202015-16.pdf.
- x www.lawworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/LW-Clinics-Report-2017-18-web.pdf.
- xi The data we reported on last year should be regarded as ‘transitional’ as between the two reporting systems, so last year’s report reported on an aggregation of April-December 2019 data collection with a pro-rata from September 2017 to March 2018 collection period, see www.lawworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/LW-Clinic-Report-2018.pdf. Any comparisons between LawWorks clinics datasets for 2017, 2018 and 2019 should bear this in mind.
- xii www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/resources/clinic-resources/monitoring-and-impact
- xiii National clinics are also significantly concentrated in London.

Regional breakdown of national clinics	
East	2
Greater London	13
North West	3
South East	2
West Midlands	1
Yorkshire & Humber	1
Wales	1

- xiv www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/resources/clinic-resources/monitoring-and-impact/client-outcomes.
- xv LawWorks Activities and Impact report, www.lawworks.org.uk/about-us/news/lawworks-activities-and-impact-report.

LawWorks is a charity working in England and Wales to connect volunteer lawyers with people in need of legal advice, who are not eligible for legal aid and cannot afford to pay and with the not-for-profit organisations that support them.



www.lawworks.org.uk
Registered charity number 1064274